DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 002 CS 204 643

AUTHOR Comstock, George; Cobbey, Robin E.
TITLE Television and the Children of Ethnic Minorities.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (61st, Seattle, Washington, August 13-16, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Development; *Behavior Patterns; Blacks; *Childhood Attitudes; *Commercial Television; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Information Needs; Literature Reviews; *Minority Group Children; Modeling (Psychological); Parent Role; Programing (Broadcast); Research Needs; Socialization; *Television Research; Television Viewing; Values
IDENTIFIERS *Media Effects

APSTRACT

The children of ethnic minorities appear to have a distinctive pattern in regard to television. The pattern is exemplified by a different orientation toward the medium, by differences in tastes and preferences, by atypical behavioral effects, and by different information needs. Minority children, however, may be presumed to share much about television with other children, including the common pattern of parental concern, limited parental control over viewing, and considerable potential for the exertion of parental influence over impact on attitudes and behavior. Prior findings lead to a research agenda emphasizing television's influence relative to that of other socializing agents, the feasibility and techniques for intervention by parents and schools in the communication flowing from television to the child, the bases of minority taste and preference, and the factors responsible for atypical behavioral effects. One hypothesis suggested by prior research is that television, by its portrayals, establishes the status hierarchy ascribed to characters portrayed on television independently of real world experience. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED168002

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

TELEVISION AND THE CHILDREN OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

by

George Comstock

Professor

S.I. Newhouse School
of Public Communications

Syracuse University

Robin E. Cobbey

Doctoral Student

S.I. Newhouse School
of Public Communications

Syracuse University

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

George Comstock
Robin E. Cobbey

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

CS204643

Presented to the Minorities and Communication Division, Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Seattle, Washington, August 1978.

TELEVISION AND THE CHILDREN OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

George Comstock and Robin E. Cobbey

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

INTRODUCTION

The egalitarian principle has not been honored in the representation of ethnic minorities as the subjects of research on television and behavior. A recent analysis of about 2,300 social and behavioral science studies concerned with television--a close approximation of the entire scientific literature on the topic--found only about seven percent providing noteworthy data on "minorities and the poor" (Comstock and Fisher, 1975). Even proportional representation would fail to achieve equality in available knowledge; findings of value accrue with no greater rapidity for minorities than for the white majority, and the scarcity of such populations in the scientific literature is paralleled by the poverty of our knowledge about their behavior. The problem is perfectly illustrated in the paradox of the probability sample: a statistically representative sample of the nation will contain too few representatives of ethnic minorities for anything beyond the most cursory analyses.

There are a number of truisms--in the sense of undisputed circumstances--that function as warnings to those who would investigate the behavior of minorities in response to the mass media. These include the possibility of differences in language that may confound the interpretation of test and questionnaire responses; the heightened suspicion and distrust of outsiders that may hamper the

---

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the invitational conference on Television and the Socialization of the Minority Child sponsored by the Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, April 27-28, 1978

effectiveness of interviewers and others different in race or socioeconomic status from their subjects; the greater readiness with which those who perceive themselves in a disadvantaged position may attempt to fulfill the expectations of those indicating an interest in their thoughts or behavior; the more frequent inability of those who belong to groups where education, socioeconomic status, and life experience are often delimited by the standards of the mainstream to comprehend what they are asked; and the sensitivity to outside exploitation -- by intent or beneficent maladroitness -- that sets those who undertake to represent minorities to refuse or avoid cooperation with those who would study them. These circumstances, by reasons of less developed cognitive skills and greater social dependence, are generally exacerbated among children. They are compressed in the term "access" -- to the people under study, and to their minds and lives.

It would be foolish to underestimate the potential disruption of orderly research -- feasible, interpretable, and comparable in result -- by such factors. Nevertheless, they are factors that are general to the social and behavioral sciences rather than specific to the study of television and other mass media. Our focus instead is one issue of substance--the propositions supported by prior research, the limitations of the available evidence, and the agenda for future research.

We are primarily concerned with broadcast television, and therefore commercial television and entertainment, because these represent, as they do for the public as a whole, largely the television experience of the American child, ethnic minority or otherwise in heritage. We will begin by outlining

what the studies presently available suggest about the role of television in the socialization of the minority world. Then we will draw on this background to advance future directions for research.

AMERICAN TELEVISION

The element shared in the experience of both Caucasian and ethnic minority children is the American system of broadcasting. There are 985 stations -- 717 privately-owned commercial stations operated for a profit, and 268 public stations whose non-profit status is so successful that deficits are common. Such statistics vastly overestimate the role of non-commercial stations in American television. Many of the non-commercial stations are thoroughly instructional in emphasis; others are restricted in their access to audiences by assignment to UHF channels, which cannot be received on TV sets built before 1964 and often are received inadequately on sets of the most recent vintage. Even in those markets where public television seeks a general audience and is on VHF, such as New York and Chicago, its share in the mid-1970s of evening viewers was three percent and only slightly more in the daytime (Comstock et al., 1978). Nationally, the average evening share probably was less than two percent. The 4.7 million hours of programming broadcast annually by the commercial stations provide at least 95 percent of the American television experience. This figure is not seriously altered for ethnic minority children by their sizable viewing of Sesame Street and other products of Children's Television Workshop. Children's programming accounts for most of public television's appeal to minority audiences (Lyle, 1975), and much of any of the legitimacy to any claims that it is not elitist in appeal. However,

the viewing of such programming typically constitutes a small proportion of a child's television viewing, and the celebrated Sesame Street itself is confined in appeal to a narrow age range of young children. The majority of children's viewing -- 90 percent is a good estimate -- occurs outside of both public television and the commercial Saturday morning programming designed to attract children.

The significance of this pattern lies in the kind of television available to ethnic minority children. It is largely commercial television produced to entertain. It is largely television produced for a general audience in which adults predominate. Because the business of television is selling access to audiences to advertisers, it is television designed to attract a mass audience. There is scant place in such a system for the ways that set any minority apart; differences command attention only when they can be used as blocks in building a larger audience.

FOUR PROPOSITIONS

The available evidence leads us to propose four broad hypotheses. They are propositions for which there is support, but whose value is as much heuristic as predictive. This circumstance derives in part from the inadequacy of the evidence in their behalf, and particularly so from its failure to cover the variety of ethnic minorities or to apply clearly to their children; it derives with equal force from their lack of specificity. They nevertheless serve well in giving the scientific literature coherence, and by establishing themes with implications for future research.

Hypothesis I: Ethnic minority children have a distinctive orientation toward television and other mass media.

Support for such a proposition comes largely, but not wholly, from data reflecting adult -- and therefore, parental-- behavior, and almost wholly from

data on blacks. We encounter such data in regard to use of television, attitudes toward television, and motives for viewing television.

The bulk of evidence suggests that blacks on the average are heavier viewers of television. This was initially interpreted as the result of the greater proportion of households of lower socioeconomic status among the black population, but the cumulative findings point toward a less commonplace explanation. Bogart (1972) examined a massive data base -- the 15,332 cases in the 1970 W.R. Simmons national probability sample on media use. He had previously concluded (Bogart, 1968) that differences between whites and blacks in media exposure could be explained by disparities in income and differences in geographical location. He now concluded that the explanation held for newspaper reading and radio listening, but not for television viewing; "...television," he inferred, "plays a somewhat different role in the lives of Negroes than of whites at similar levels of income and education." What the Simmons data documented was that blacks on the average view more television than do whites. Greenberg and Dervin (1970) found the same ethnic difference in their 1968-69 Cleveland, Philadelphia, and East Lansing samples -- except that they found it to extend to high school and elementary school children. Our caution against embracing too quickly a conclusion applying generally to ethnic minorities or to all places is aroused, however, by Lyle and Hoffman's (1972) southern California sample in which viewing was greater among elementary and high school girls with Spanish surnames but not among the boys.

Blacks as a group rather definitely hold more favorable attitudes toward television than do whites. Bower (1973), in his 1970 national probability sample, found that blacks express greater liking for television, more frequently concur that, as individuals, they do not watch it enough, and are more likely

to believe they are watching more than in past years. One of the most consistent patterns of mass media behavior in America has been an inverse relationship between socioeconomic status and both attitudes favorable toward television and use of television (Robinson and Converse, 1972; Robinson, 1972; Steiner, 1963; Bower, 1973). This pattern dissolves in the black affinity for television. It is as if ethnic status carries with it a history, a set of needs, a body of motives, and a perspective that create, from the same media, distinctly different media. The inverse relationship so persistent among the white majority is, among blacks, either attentuated or reversed. Better educated blacks appear to hold attitudes more favorable toward the medium than their less educated peers; better educated blacks do not appear to watch markedly less television than their less educated peers (Bower, 1973). The stronger black affinity for television becomes visible early, for Greenberg and Dervin (1970) found that black children and adolescents from families of lower socioeconomic status view more than white of comparable age and family socioeconomic status.

The shift of blacks toward television, and away from newspapers, as a source of political information is a special instance of their distinctive orientation toward the medium. McCombs (1968) traces media use by blacks and whites during the four presidential elections between 1952 and 1964. The Michigan Survey Research Center national samples were divided into high or low media users, when television and newspaper use were consistent, and into television or newspaper users, when they were not. The results mark one of the more socially significant trends in media use of our time. In 1952, the majority of blacks were low media users during the campaign. By 1964, the majority were high media users and there was little difference between blacks and whites in the proportion of high users. Blacks also did not differ from whites in the

degree of principal reliance on newspapers. However, the proportion of blacks who relied principally on television increased sharply, while no such trend occurred among whites. The emerging black orientation toward television for political information was independent of education; it was not attributable to shifts in the distribution of education, nor was it confined to any educational strata.

Television, of course, is predominantly entertainment -- a judgment that remains the same whether the basis is the content or the public's perception of the medium (Comstock et al., 1978). Nevertheless, the evidence supports the view that ethnic minorities are motivated to a greater-than-average degree in their consumption of that entertainment by a desire for information. Bower (1973) found that persons of lower socioeconomic status, who are more frequent among minorities, more often cite learning as a motive for television viewing. Greenberg and Dervin (1970) found that both black elementary and black high school students from families of lower socioeconomic status more often cited learning as a motive for viewing, and more frequently agreed that television portrays life accurately, than did white peers of similar socioeconomic status, although socioeconomic status itself appeared to be inversely related to the holding of such beliefs. This heightened information motive is something ethnic minority youth and the disadvantaged share with the elderly -- leading to the hypothesis that it is the product of isolation from the social mainstream.

There are a number of possible explanations for the apparently distinctive orientation of blacks toward television (Comstock et al., 1978). The "political adaptation" hypothesis holds that the civil rights movement inspired information-seeking beneficial to television because the movement followed shortly after the medium's rise to prominence. The related "print stigma" hypothesis holds that a

principal factor was the relative advantage gained by the new competitor from the history of unacceptable newspaper treatment. Both apply more clearly to use of television news than to the medium generally, but conceivably could explain what has been observed. The "disparate values" hypothesis holds that blacks, exclusive of differences in educational level, were less integrated into the "book culture," adherence to whose values has been plausibly offered (Meyersohn, 1965) as an explanation of the greater hostility toward television of the better educated. The "integration" hypothesis holds that television achieved its popularity and status among blacks by providing a symbol of assimilation -- either through the information it offered, or through the participation implied by its consumption. We do not have data that encourages us to choose among these alternatives. We suspect that transient factors related to black (and white) history are at work, because the well-known phenomenon of greater viewing by the elderly (Harris, 1974; Chaffee and Wilson, 1975; Schramm, 1968, 1969; Comstock et al., 1978) does not appear among blacks in the data so far available -- leading us toward an explanation dependent on the experience of specific black generations.

Hypothesis II: Children of ethnic minorities have different tastes and preferences in television programming.

American television is an enormously successful mass medium attracting huge, diverse audiences nightly, and less diverse but sizable audiences at other times. Ethnic minority children, if we accept the evidence suggesting that they view somewhat more than average, presumably are at least proportionately represented in these audiences -- the almost 60 percent of 2-11 year olds viewing between 9 and 11 a.m. on the typical fall or winter Saturday, the 40 percent or more viewing between 7 and 9 p.m. during the surrounding weekdays, and the 30 percent

or more of teenagers viewing between 7 and 10 p.m. on those weekdays. Disguised by the mass nature of television, however, are differences in tastes and preferences deriving from ethnic minority membership.

Lyle and Hoffman (1972), in comparing Caucasian, Spanish surname, and black children in a Los Angeles basin community, found differences among these groups in programs cited as favorites. The differences, not discernible at first grade, became increasingly apparent between the sixth and tenth grades. Greenberg and Dervin (1970) found differences in favorite programs between white and black elementary and high school students in the Midwest. Fletcher (1969) found the declared favorites of black and white Atlanta children in the sixth through the twelfth grade differed. Surlin and Dominick (1970) found differences in the favorites of black and white Philadelphia teenagers.

There is also evidence that differences occur among adults. Greenberg and Hanneman (1970) found that in a Michigan sample blacks reported viewing somewhat different programming than did whites. Carey (1966) compared viewing data for blacks and whites in national samples of about 5,000 families in each of two years; in both cases, only slightly more than half the top 25 most popular programs were the same for blacks and whites. However, Greenberg and Dervin (1970) found sufficient similarity in the ranking of favorite programs by blacks and whites alike in low socioeconomic status to conclude that they were "quite similar" in preferences.

There is not a readily discernible pattern of elaborate character in the data. Several of the studies have taken socioeconomic status into account (Greenberg and Dervin, 1970; Surlin and Dominick, 1970), and the findings, inconsistent as to the responsibility of socioeconomic differences, do not lead us to accept them as entirely accountable. There seems to be little doubt that

ethnic minority children prefer programming with performers of like ethnicity (Lyle, 1972; Lyle and Hoffman, 1972; Greenberg, 1972; Greenberg and Dervin, 1970). There is evidence that black children are especially drawn to programs featuring families (Surlin and Dominick, 1970; Greenberg and Dervin, 1970). Adult blacks share the propensity for black television performers (Greenberg and Hanneman, 1970); they do not appear to share the same inclination toward family programs (Carey, 1966). The ethnic differences found by Greenberg and Dervin (1970) for children and adolescents and their absence in the same investigative context among adults, with socioeconomic influences taken into account; the apparent divergence between the disinterest of black adults in family programs found by Carey (1966) and the appeal of such programs to black teenagers found by Surlin and Dominick (1970); and the increase in differentiation found by Lyle and Hoffman (1972) to occur with age -- these findings combine to suggest that differences in taste emerge progressively as children grow older, then become modified and possibly sharply attenuated in adulthood.

Hypothesis III: The behavioral response of children and adolescents to television portrayals is in part dependent on ethnic minority membership.

Several experiments published in the early 1960s -- by Feshbach (1961), Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963a), and by Berkowitz and Rawlings (1963) -- established a foundation for a psychology of the behavioral effects of audiovisual media. There are now numerous published experiments that test hypotheses about the consequences for behavior of film and television portrayals (Comstock, 1975). For the most part, these experiments have been concerned with the effects of portrayals of violent or aggressive behavior on the subsequent display of aggressive behavior by viewers (Comstock et al., 1978). Some have been concerned with the effects of portrayals on other dimensions of behavior -- most often on what is called "prosocial" behavior. A very few permit inferences

about the probable role of ethnicity in differential effects.

The evidence provided by this substantial body of experimentation does not establish that television has a socially significant net impact on the behavior of its viewers. If the question were whether television has any significant impact, we would not have to go beyond the amount of time it consumes and the changes it has brought about in the time-budgets and leisure environment of Americans (Robinson, 1969; Robinson and Converse, 1972; Comstock et al., 1979). The experimentation ignores the amount of time spent with the medium to examine the influence of portrayals that may be televised. It fails to gauge net impact, even when demonstrating the contingency of subsequent behavior on exposure to a portrayal, because the conventions of experimentation correctly (Aronson and Carlsmith, 1968; Bandura, 1973) ignore the demographic representativeness of any one set of subjects and encourage the introduction of artificiality in behalf of sensitive measurement. What it does provide is evidence that television can influence behavior, and the empirical verification of some of the circumstances on which such influence is likely to be contingent. Among these circumstances, investigated mostly but not exclusively in regard to aggressiveness, are reward or lack of punishment for the portrayed perpetrator (Bandura, 1965), depiction of the behavior as justified (Berkowitz and Rawlings, 1963), cues in real life that match those of the portrayed target for the behavior (Berkowitz and Geen, 1966), depiction of the perpetrator as similar to the viewer (Rosekrans, 1967), characterization of violent interaction as malevolently motivated (Berkowitz and Alioto, 1973), labelling of the portrayal as real rather than fictional (Feshbach, 1972), the presentation of highly exciting material of any sort (Tannenbaum and Zillmann, 1975; Zillmann, 1971), and the absence of criticism of portrayed aggression from a source external to the portrayal (Lefcourt et al., 1966).

The findings give support to the social learning theory of Bandura (1969, 1971, 1973) and to the facilitation theory of Berkowitz (1962; 1964; 1973). The former holds that portrayals essentially teach behavior through the power of observation to increase the capability to perform an act in the absence of immediate practice or reinforcement, and that they additionally alter the likelihood of performing an act by shaping beliefs about its acceptability and efficacy. The latter holds that portrayals alter subsequent behavior by affecting inhibitory processes, particularly by enhancing the capability of environmental cues to elicit behavior.

The experiments involving ethnicity encourage the view that it affects the way these processes operate. Nicholas, McCarter and Heckel (1971a) examined the effects of sex, race, and competency of model on children's imitation of televised portrayals. A sex-and-race-balanced group of 60 second grade children responded to multiple choice questions, half of which were purposefully too difficult, while viewing a videotape of four peers matched in sex and race who displayed prearranged answers to the same questions. White girls imitated white and black boys more frequently and black girls imitated black boys most and white boys least frequently. Girls imitated boys more than boys imitated girls. Nicholas and colleagues (1971b) then examined the effects of adult vs. peer status. Procedures were identical to their first experiment except that white models were used: an adult male, adult female, a boy and a girl. Overall, children chose to imitate the adult over the peer model. Additionally, boys imitated males more faithfully than did girls imitating the woman. The sole ethnic difference was that black children imitated the woman less often than did white children.

Neely, Heckel, and Leichtman (1973) investigated the effects of reinforcement and race of model on the imitative behavior of black children aged three

to five. Children viewed a videotaped black or white peer-aged model perform a task for which verbal reward or punishment was given. The children then performed the same series of tasks. Children imitated the white more than the black, and the rewarded more than the punished, model. Race appeared to be as important as reinforcement of behavior, for the white punished model was imitated about as much a the rewarded black model. These results are consistent with those of Liebert, Sobol, and Copemann (1972) who employed live adult models; black children again were more likely to match responses of rewarded models and white models. Neely and colleagues suggest that the greater tendency to imitate a white model is attributable to the status discrepancy favoring whites, which ostensibly makes blacks more vulnerable to their influence.

Thelen and Soltz (1969) report somewhat different results. Black children who observed a televised white adult model receiving verbal reward showed less imitative behavior than black children observing the model receiving no consequences for his behavior. In a subsequent experiment, the opposite results were found among white children. The investigators speculated that the black children had previously learned that reward or praise to a white model will not necessarily apply to their own similar behavior. Thelen (1971) later tested this interpretation by introducing race of subject and model. Groups of black and white five- and six-year olds of equivalent socio-economic status viewed televised portrayals of praised or unpraised white or black adults performing aggressive acts toward an inflated bear. Dependent measures were verbal and physical imitation, and recall of aggressive behavior. White children viewing the black model displayed more imitative behavior than any other group. Both black and white children were able to recall more of the white model's behavior than children who observed a black model. Black children had higher recall scores in the nonreinforced condition, a finding consistent with the earlier experiment (Thelen and Soltz, 1969). However, the author argues that differential

reinforcement history is not the correct interpretation because black children viewing the praised white model exhibited as much imitative behavior as white children in the same condition.

These varied results are consistent with several hypotheses. On the whole, they are reminiscent of the findings by Bandura and colleagues (Bandura, Ross, and Ross, 1961, 1963a, 1963b; Bandura, 1965, 1973) concerning the relationship between sex of model and sex of the viewing child. Portrayals of aggressive models more readily elicited imitative aggression in males, presumably because aggression is more socially accepted on the part of males, but females were later able to reproduce the observed behavior when a reward was offered, thus demonstrating that learning may have occurred even when its contribution is not readily observable in performance; portrayals of males had the most impact on boys, while portrayals of females were not similarly effective with girls. These findings encourage an interpretation of the results for ethnicity in which similarity of model and viewer become subordinate to ascribed status. Rosekrans (1967) demonstrated that a young viewer's perception of similarity between himself and a portrayed person increased the likelihood of his emulating that portrayal. The findings for ethnicity do not contradict the inference that perceived similarity enhances the likelihood of behavioral influence. However, the pattern detectable in the results favors emphasis on the social status normally ascribed to the portrayed personages. Males, of whatever race, enjoy an advantage over females. Whites, in most instances, enjoy some advantage over ethnic minorities. These generalizations become confounded, as the early findings on sex and aggressiveness hint, when behavior is more normative for a demographic category; similarity may then play a larger role. The early findings on increased behavioral capability despite the absence of evidence

from immediate performance similarly lead us to be skeptical that the experimental outcomes attributable to ethnicity fully reflect the learning that results from viewing.

Hypothesis IV: Ethnic minority children have information needs that give particular prominence to television as a source of guidance.

All children certainly have similar information needs. What sets ethnic minority children apart is their relative isolation from sources for the satisfaction of those needs. This circumstance arises in part from their ethnicity, but more from the socioeconomic disadvantage that is frequently associated with minority status. Thus the evidence suggests that minority children share with children of lower socioeconomic status generally a particular reliance on television--because it brings information that is not otherwise readily available.

Gerson (1966) found that black teenagers relied more on television than did white teenagers for information about how to behave with the opposite sex. Although there was greater reliance by the blacks on the mass media generally for such information, reliance on television was particularly pronounced; this is in accord with the usual pattern in which mass media use by the young is strongly focused on television. The greater reliance on television was expressed both in the verifying of present practices and the seeking of new practices. Two relationships emphasize the particular role of television in this instance--the reversal, among the blacks, of an inverse relationship for the whites between integration into the peer culture and reliance on the media, and the contrast in sex roles in which black males but white girls were, within each racial group, most reliant on the media. What these findings convey is isolation from alternative sources of information coupled with male responsibility for action; thus, integration into the peer culture facilitated information-seeking among

the blacks, but had no such effect in the case of the whites, where mass media use presumably was a substitute for the information deriving naturally from social interaction and from peers. Surlin and Dominick (1970), of course, found that black teenagers, unlike black adults, displayed a preference for programs featuring families. Such a preference was also found more pronounced among white teenagers from families of lower socioeconomic status.

The interpretation of these varied findings plausibly conforms to that applied by DeFleur and DeFleur (1967) to their data on children's knowledge of occupations. Television appeared to provide knowledge about occupations with which the children had no firsthand experience. Prestige-rankings by the children were more consistent for the portrayed but otherwise unfamiliar occupations than for those with which the child had had actual experience or those with which he had neither media nor firsthand experience. These findings imply an effect for television when experience fails; they also imply that television, because of the limited, stereotypic scope of its portrayals, may provide a homogenizing influence--an implication to which the data on ethnic minority children would not by themselves lead.

THE CONTEXT

What the emphasis on differences too easily obscures is the commonality of the television experience in American childhood. The pattern that appears to hold for ethnic minority children is not so distinct from that for the rest of the population as to make them incongenerous. Most children watch a good deal of television; there are wide variations in individual tastes and preferences; experiments on the effects of television portrayals as are most experiments, are marked by wide individual variation as well as by statistically significant differences in means attributable to manipulation of the independent variable; individual children often--perhaps almost always--have information needs that are peculiar to their circumstances. These banalities of empiricism force

acknowledgment that television is a mass medium to which the heterogeneity of response dwarfs any difference that may occur between distinguishable groups.

Two themes that gather reinforcement from a variety of data on children's behavior in regard to television are the paradoxes of limited parental authority over viewing and decided parental influence over effects. Several studies (Lyle and Hoffman, 1972; Lyle, 1972; Bower, 1973; Chaffee, McLeod, and Atkin, 1970; Hess and Goldman, 1962; Stein and Friedrich, 1972; Greenberg and Dervin, 1970) lead to the conclusion that, although parents may often express concern over television's influence, persistent, regular efforts to control amount of viewing are infrequent. In exercising control, parents more often give attention to taboo programs than amount of viewing. The degree of alarm that lurks in the parental heart is illustrated by the increase in parental efforts to censor exposure to programs, unparalleled by any similar attention to the hours devoted to television, as children reach the ages of 10-12 (Bower, 1973)--a trend opposite to the enhanced freedom that one would expect to accompany growing up. Several other studies provide evidence that parents or other important adults can exert considerable influence on the effects that television viewing may have. In one, television was found to be the principal source of information on a controversial issue but parents appeared to shape the child's partisanship (Tolley, 1973); in a second, positive correlations between prior violence viewing and peer-rated aggressiveness were reduced sharply when parents emphasized non-aggressive behavior (McLeod, Atkin, and Chaffee, 1972); in another, perceived parental attitudes towards aggression explained more variation in attitudes favoring aggressive behavior than did exposure to violent programming (Dominick and Greenberg, 1972); and, in a fourth, the presence of an adult observer who

had made positive or negative comments about a portrayal of aggressive behavior was enough to raise or lower the subsequent imitative aggression of children (Hicks, 1968). Thus, parents typically exercise little control over amount of time spent with television, exercise somewhat more control and display some anxiety over what occasionally is viewed, but are capable of exerting considerable influence over the impact of what television conveys.

DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

The most prominent unaddressed issue is the influence of television relative to that of other agents of socialization. The importance we now tentatively assign to television among the children of ethnic minorities derives from findings of enhanced position for the medium--in terms of exposure, credibility, and as a source of information--and not from evidence of particularly forceful impact compared to other of other possible influences.

On this issue, the children of ethnic minorities do not stand apart. With a very few exceptions--those findings that television is preeminent for public affairs information , that it is particularly important as a source of information when other sources are absent, and that its influence on attitudes and behavior is contingent on the expression of parental belief--we are similarly ignorant about all children.

What is responsible for our ignorance are the methodological problems that confront the assigning of everyday influence when the candidates approach ubiquity. Nevertheless, we must assign high priority even to crude strategems, for until we can more thoroughly identify the specific role of television in socialization the view that it has usurped to a significant degree the influence of such acknowledged agents as parents, the school, and the community (Bandura, 1969, 1971, 1973) will remain speculation, although certainly speculation consistent with the knowledge that we do have.

Four other directions for new research to which the present findings

Direction 1: The efficacy of parental guidance in regard to children's use of the mass media.

The evidence is that parental intervention in amount of viewing is slight, but somewhat more tinged with urgency in regard to what is viewed, and that parents can exert considerable influence over the effects of what is viewed. This pattern raises the question of how parental intervention might be made more effective. This question, in turn, divides into issues of focus, technique, and constancy. We cannot halt with knowledge of how parents can most effectively intervene, or where their intervention might be effectively directed. Child-rearing is an everyday business, not a manipulation in a laboratory experiment, and we must also be concerned with maintaining effective intervention. These issues take on particular poignancy in regard to the children of ethnic minorities because of their greater viewing (at least by blacks) and possibly greater dependence on the medium for information. The report that black children experience greater parental involvement in viewing (Greenberg and Atkin, 1978) suggests that among minorities parental intervention might be particularly efficacious.

Direction II: The form and feasibility of intervention by the schools in the communication flowing from television to the child.

The evidence supports the view that television's influence is contingent to a substantial degree on the communication from adults. This is consistent with the proposition advanced two decades ago by Himmelweit, Oppenheim, and Vince (1958) that television influences where there is a vacuum of firsthand experience or alternative influences in play. Television is often depicted as a competitor to the classroom teacher; the statistic most often cited by journalists is the greater number of hours that the average individual will have spent with television than in school at any given moment in his life. What this in turn suggests is the examination of the role that schools do and might play in regard

to television. Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961), at the conclusion of their historic investigation of television and children in the early days of the medium questioned whether schools were doing enough with and about television. The same question is not less pertinent today. If schools do more, television has become more unambiguously a part of the modern environment; it consumes more time, and earlier inverse relationships between both family education and individual intelligence and hours spent with television appear to be disappearing (Comstock et al., 1978; Lyle, 1972). Schools can intervene in the television-to-child communication by teaching about the media--how they operate, what their values are, which symbols and images predominate. Such research has particular relevance to minority children not solely because of the data suggesting their relationship to television makes the medium more important to them, but also because intervention through the schools to help minorities is an accepted norm of American society.

Direction III: The patterns of viewing and preferences that hold for the children of ethnic minorities.

The evidence that is so suggestive of a somewhat distinct pattern for ethnic minority children is drawn almost wholly from blacks and rests on the accumulation of findings varying in place, time, quality, and sometimes in outcome. The notion that minorities prefer performers similar or alike in ethnic background is so plausible that further empirical support is hardly necessary. No such statement can be made about any other aspect of the behavior of the minority child as a member of the television audience. We know nothing about the current television behavior of black children, and nothing about the television behavior of Spanish surname, Oriental, or American Indian children. We cannot assume that what these other groups have in common with blacks necessarily dictates like behavior in regard to television. Even where there are differences in programming preferences that set a minority apart, as apparently is the case with black children, there remain the two questions--what is the basis for the

observed difference, and what lies behind the degree of commonality with majority preference? The distinctive pattern cries for interpretation; more obscured is the meaning to be attached to the portion of majority taste to which minorities subscribe. The data certainly suggest that black children view more than do white, but there are no similar data on other minorities, and the inferences about blacks rests on comparisons not immune to criticisms of atypicallity. Such research would provide an important foundation for the design of interventions by parents and school, for the efficacy of an intervention depends not only on its forcefulness and skill, but on the accuracy of application. It would also supply the understanding of the television behavior of minority children for which we now largely substitute speculation.

Direction IV: Exploration of factors responsible for differential behavioral response to televised portrayals associated with ethnic membership.

The experimental evidence on televised portrayals leads to the tentative conclusion that a principal factor in differential behavioral outcomes is the ascribed status attached to ethnic membership. Race and sex, on the part both of who is portrayed and those who view, make a difference. The failure of the scant data available to support the hypothesis of minority ethnic discount for observed reward (Thelen, 1971) is intriguing, not conclusive. The many other issues that might be raised have a similar status--the data are at best intriguing, more often not existent. Among these issues are: (a) variation in outcome attributable conceivably to the class of behavior involved, with socially-disapproved behavior possibly most enjoying enhancement from the ascribed status of a perpetrator; (b) the influence of portrayed prior association between models differing in ethnicity, for it is plausible that egalitarianism in portrayal might find a mirror in equivalent impact; and, (c) the validity of the inferred processes, which even in regard to ascribed status rest on interpretations applied to events rather than on data--such as from the subjects themselves--that might disconfirm them. Ethnic group position will change, and ethnic groups themselves

are hardly homogeneous in the attibutes that constitute status; attention, then, should focus on the variables responsible for effects related to ethnicity, rather than simply on ethnic differences.

There is also an issue raised by the data on ethnicity and television portrayals that has profound implications for the study of the medium. Greenberg (1972) found evidence of substantial identification by white children with black television characters. More interestingly, he found that such identification was associated with greater exposure to the medium, but was unrelated to greater everyday contact with blacks. Th' suggests the hypothesis that television may, to some degree, operate independently in establishing the emulative potential of those portrayed. Grossly put, television may determine the status hierarchy applicable to portrayed models, while the real world determines status for live models. This would imply that portrayals of whites may enjoy an advantage because whites more frequently appear on the medium; thus, for television, they have been ascribed an elev.ted status by television.

CONCLUSION

It is easy to lose sight of television as a mass medium in the pursuit of relationships that reflect ethnic minority membership. The issues that are raised by ethnic status are not exclusive to ethnicity, but represent circumstances much wider in occurrence that appear more often among ethnic minorities. Isolation, economic disadvantage, lack of alternative sources of information are not unique to minorities; nor is extensive use of television. The average child two to eleven years of age views more than the average adult between the ages 18-49; minority status and economic disadvantage amplify his consumption. The children of ethnic minorities merit attention in regard to television on theoretical grounds, because of the particular circumstances they as a group

sometimes exemplify; they merit attention on practical groups because these circumstances probably do place them in a special relationship to television. In the end, however, what we examine in giving attention to ethnic minorities is the more general state of children and the mass media.

REFERENCES

Adler, R. (Ed.) Research on the effects of television advertising on children. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977.

Aronson, E., and Carlsmith, J. M. Experimentation in social psychology. In G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (Eds.), The handbook of social psychology. Vol. II. Research methods. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1968.

Bandura, A. Influence of models' reinforcement contingencies on the acquisition of imitative responses. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1965, 1, 589-595.

Bandura, A. Social-learning theory of identificatory processes. In D. A. Goslin (Eds.), Handbook of socialization theory and research. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969. Pp. 213-262.

Bandura, A. Social learning theory. New York: General Learning Press, 1971.

Bandura, A. Aggression: A social learning analysis. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Bandura, A., Ross, D., and Ross, S. A. Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1961, 63, 575-582.

Bandura, A., Ross, D., and Ross, S. A. Imitation of film-mediated aggressive models. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1963a, 66, 3-11.

Bandura, A., Ross, D., and Ross, S. A. Vicarious reinforcement and imitative learning. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1963b, 67, 601-607.

Berkowitz, L. Aggression: A social psychological analysis. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962.

Berkowitz, L. Aggressive cues in aggressive behavior and hostility catharsis. Psychological Review, 1964, 71, 104-122.

Berkowitz, L. Words and symbols as stimuli to aggressive responses. In J. F. Knutson (Ed.), Control of aggression: Implications from basic research. Chicago, Ill.: Aldine-Atherton, 1973.

Berkowitz, L., and Alioto, J. T. The meaning of an observed event as a determinant of its aggressive consequences. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1973, 28, 206-217.

Berkowitz, L., and Geen, R. G. Film violence and the cue properties of available targets. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966, 3, 525-530.

Berkowitz, L., and Rawlings, E. Effects of film violence on inhibitions against subsequent aggression. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1963, 66, 405-412.

Bogart, L. Black is often white. Media/scope, 1968, 12, No. 11.

Bogart, L. Negro and white media exposure: New evidence. Journalism Quarterly, 1972, 49, 15-21.

Bower, R. T. Television and the public. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

Carey, J. W. Variations in Negro/white television preferences. Journal of Broadcasting, 1966, 10, 199-212.

Chaffee, S. H., McLeod, J. M., and Atkin, C. K. Parent-child similarities in television use. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism, Washington, D.C., 1970.

Chaffee, S. H., and Wilson, D. Adult life cycle changes in mass media use. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism, Ottawa, Ontario, August 1975.

Comstock, G. Television and human behavior: The key studies. Santa Monica, Calif.: The Rand Corporation, 1975.

Comstock, G., Chaffee, S., Katzman, N., McCombs, M., and Roberts, D. Television and human behavior. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.

Comstock, G., and Fisher, M. Television and human behavior: A guide to the pertinent scientific literature. Santa Monica, Calif.: The Rand Corporation, 1975.

DeFleur, M. L., and DeFleur, L. B. The relative contribution of television as a learning source for children's occupational knowledge. American Sociological Review, 1967, 32, 777-789.

Dominick, J. R., and Greenberg, B. S. Attitudes toward violence: The interaction of television, exposure, family attitudes, and social class. In G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (Eds.), Television and social behavior. Vol. 3. Television and adolescent aggressiveness. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972. Pp. 314-335.

Feshbach, S. The stimulating versus cathartic effects of a vicarious aggressive activity. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1961, 63, 381-385.

Feshbach, S. Reality and fantasy in filmed violence. In J. P. Murray, E. A. Rubinstein, and G. A. Comstock (Eds.), Television and social behavior. Vol. 2. Television and social learning. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972. Pp. 318-345.

Fletcher, A. D. Negro and white children's television program preferences. Journal of Broadcasting, 1969, 13, 359-366.

Friedman, H. L., and Johnson, R. I. Mass media use and aggression: A pilot study. In G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (Eds.), Television and social behavior. Vol. 3. Television and adolescent aggressiveness. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972. Pp. 336-360.

Gerson, W. M. Mass media socialization behavior: Negro-white differences. Social Forces, 1966, 45, 40-50.

Greenberg, B. S. Children's reactions to TV blacks. Journalism Quarterly, 1972, 49 (1), 5-14.

Greenberg, B. S., and Dervin, B. Use of the mass media by the urban poor. New York: Praeger, 1970.

Greenberg, B. S., and Hanneman, G. J. Racial attitudes and the impact of TV blacks. Educational Broadcasting Review, 1970, 4(2), 27-34.

Louis Harris and Associates, Inc. A survey on aging: Experience of older Americans vs. public expectation of old age. Conducted for the National Council on the Aging, Inc. New York: Louis Harris and Associations, 1974.

Hess, R. D., and Goldman, H. Parents' views of the effects of television on their children. Child Development, 1962, 33, 411-426.

Hicks, D. J. Effects of co-observer's sanctions and adult presence on imitative aggression. Child Development, 1968, 38, 303-309.

Himmelweit, H. T., Oppenheim, A. N., and Vince, P. Television and the child. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Lefcourt, H. M., Barnes, K., Parke, R., and Schwartz, F. Anticipated social censure and aggression-conflict as mediators of response to aggression induction. Journal of Social Psychology, 1966, 70, 251-263.

Liebert, R. M., Sobol, M. P., and Copemann, C. D. Effects of vicarious consequences and race of model upon imitative performance by black children. Developmental Psychology, 1972, 6, 453-456.

Lyle, J. Television in daily life: Patterns of use overview. In E. A. Rubinstein, G. A. Comstock, and J. P. Murray (Eds.), Television and social behavior. Vol. 4. Television in day-to-day life: Patterns of use. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972. Pp. 1-32.

Lyle, J. The people look at public television 1974. Washington, D.C.: Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 1974.

Lyle, J., and Hoffman, H. R. Children's use of television and other media. In E. A. Rubinstein, G. A. Comstock, and J. P. Murray (Eds.), Television and social behavior. Vol. 4. Television in day-to-day life: Patterns of use. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972. Pp. 129-256.

McCombs, M. E. Negro use of television and newspapers for political information, 1952-1964. Journal of Broadcasting, 1968, 12, 261-266.

McLeod, J. M., Atkin, C. K., and Chaffee, S. H. Adolescents, parents and television use: Self-report and other-report measures from the Wisconsin sample. In G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (Eds.), Television and social behavior. Vol. 3. Television and adolescent aggressiveness. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972, Pp. 239-313.

Meyersohn, R. B. Leisure and television: A study in compatibility. Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1965.

Neely, J. J., Heckel, R. V., and Leichtman, H. M. The effect of race of model and response consequences to the model on imitation in children. Journal of Social Psychology, 1973, 89, 225-231.

Nicholas, K. B., McCarter, R. E., and Heckel, R. V. The effects of race and sex on the imitation of television models. Journal of Social Psychology, 1971, 85, 315-316.

Nicholas, K. B., McCarter, R. E., and Heckel, R. V. Imitation of adult and peer television models by white and Negro children. Journal of Social Psychology, 1971, 85, 317-318.

Robinson, J. P. Television and leisure time: Yesterday, today, and (maybe) tomorrow. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1969, 33, 210-223.

Robinson, J. P. Toward defining the functions of television. In E. A. Rubinstein, G. A. Comstock, and J. P. Murray (Eds.), Television and social behavior. Vol. 4. Television in day-to-day life: Patterns of use. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972. Pp. 568-603.

Robinson, J. P., and Converse, P. E. The impact of television on mass media usages: A cross-national comparison. In A. Szalai (Ed.), The use of time: Daily activities of urban and suburban populations in twelve countries. The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1972. Pp. 197-212.

Rosekrans, M. A. Imitation in children as a function of perceived similarities to a social model of vicarious reinforcement. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1967, 7, 307-315.

Schramm, W. Leisure roles. In M. W. Riley and A. Fonger (Eds.), Aging and Society. Vol. 1. An inventory of research findings. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968.

Schramm, W. Aging and mass communication. In M. W. Riley, J. W. Riley, Jr., and M. E. Johnson (Eds.), Aging and society. Vol. 2. Aging and the professions. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1969.

Schramm, W., Lyle, J., and Parker, E. B. Television in the lives of our children. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1961.

Stein, A. H., and Friedrich, L. K. Television content and young children's behavior. In J. P. Murray, E. A. Rubinstein, and G. A. Comstock (Eds.), Television and social behavior. Vol. 2. Television and social learning. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972. Pp. 202-317.

Steiner, G. A. The people look at television. New York: Knopf, 1963.

Surlin, S. H., and Dominick, J. R. Television's function as a "third parent" for black and white teen-agers. Journal of Broadcasting, 1970, 15, 55-64.

Tannenbaum, P. H., and Zillmann, D. Emotional arousal in the facilitation of aggression through communication. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advances in experimental social psychology. Vol. 8. New York: Academic Press, 1975.

Thelen, M. H. The effect of subject race, model race, and vicarious praise on vicarious learning. Child Development, 1971, 42, 972-977.

Thelen, M. H., and Soltz, W. The effect of vicarious reinforcement on imitation in two social-racial groups. Child Development, 1969, 40, 879-887.

Tolley, H., Jr. Children and war: Political socialization to international conflict. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1973.

Zillmann, D. Excitation transfer in communication-mediated aggressive behavior. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1971, 7, 419-434.